

Double-barrelled race option on ICs from Jan 1

Move reflects growing trend of inter-racial marriages in Singapore

■ BY RACHEL CHANG

DOUBLE-BARRELLED race classifications will become a reality from Jan 1, when Singaporeans of mixed parentage will have the option of reflecting two races on their identity cards.

For example, someone whose mother is Indian and father, Chinese, can change his identity card to be identified as Indian-Chinese or Chinese-Indian.

Currently, they are registered either as Chinese or Indian.

Mixed-race couples will have the same option for their newborn children.

And should the child grow up to prefer a different race classification, he or she can change it from the age of 21.

Details of the change, which was announced in Parliament in January this year, were released by the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) yesterday.

The new policy is “in recognition of evolving societal changes”, it said.

In recent years, inter-racial marriages have been on an upward trend. In 2007, 16.4 per cent of about 24,000 marriages were inter-racial, compared to 8.9 per cent of 25,667 marriages a decade earlier.

The ICA made clear how the new flexibility would be implemented.

For the purposes of government policy, such as the assignment of mother tongue language class in schools and the ethnic quota applied in Housing Board estates, the first component of a double-barrelled race will be used – the race that comes before the hyphen.

“There will not be any advantage in terms of policy considerations for those who register either a double-barrelled or a singular race,” the ICA statement said.

Published statistics on race from now on will also be based on first-component races.

The policy also comes with some caveats. For inter-racial couples, all their children must be registered with the same double-barrelled race classification.

If a change of race classification for any child is required, all siblings must change their race together.

er. From the age of 21, however, this restriction is lifted.

Altogether, there are three chances to determine the racial classification of a mixed-race child born on or after Jan 1 next year: at birth, anytime before the age of 21, and anytime after the age of 21.

Full details of the policy and registration procedure can be found on ICA’s website, at www.ica.gov.sg

Singaporeans affected greeted the details of the changes yesterday with mixed feelings.

Undergraduate Shahril Yong, 24, lamented that the new flexibility came too late for him. Although he looks Malay, his race is classified as Chinese – his father’s race.

Before this year, children of mixed-race parentage had no choice but to take their paternal race.

“If my IC had said Malay, I could have received a university tuition fee subsidy,” he said. “If I were younger, I would change to Malay-Chinese for that.”

The Government subsidises the tertiary education of Malay students whose monthly household in-

comes are below \$3,000. Students whose families earn less than \$2,000 get a full tuition subsidy, while those whose families earn between \$2,000 and \$3,000 get a subsidy of 70 per cent of tuition fees.

The option to change one’s racial classification again after the age of 21 also gave others pause.

Teacher Laremy Lee, whose ethnicity is Chinese-Indian, said that some might make the change in adulthood to take advantage of housing policies.

“If the Chinese ethnic quota is full but not the Indian, some might change their classification to Indian-Chinese to buy a flat,” said the 27-year-old.

But he added that such loopholes are part and parcel of having a less rigid system of racial classification.

For Mrs Sarah Sum-Campbell, a Chinese Singaporean married to a Briton, the new classifications will allow both her and her young children’s heritage to be fully reflected.

The mother of two wanted her children’s surname to be made up of both her Chinese surname and her husband’s.

Similarly, double-barrelled race classifications will help them with their identities, she added. “They know they are not from a single race, and this will hopefully make them more open-minded to people of all backgrounds.”

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Dad’s Indian-Chinese, mum’s Malay-German: What’s Junior’s race?

■ My spouse and I are each registered with a double-barrelled race and we wish to register a double-barrelled race for our child. What are the race options available for our child?

Your child can take any two of the four race components of the parents, but your child’s first component race must be taken from the first component race of either parent. Your child’s double-barrelled race will be limited to two components with one hyphen. The following are examples of how your child’s double-barrelled race may be recorded.

Example: If the father is Indian-Chinese and the mother is Malay-German, the child’s race may be recorded as Indian-Chinese (following the father’s race), Malay-German (following the mother’s race), Indian-Malay, Indian-German, Malay-Chinese or Malay-Indian (combinations of the father’s and mother’s races, with the first component race following the first component race of either parent).

■ I am Malay-Chinese and my wife is Indian-Thai. Can I register our child with a single race?

Yes, you can register a single race for your child, but the race option must be taken from the first component of the father’s or mother’s race (i.e. the child can be registered as Malay or Indian).

■ The administration of the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) is determined by the first component race of a person’s double-barrelled race. If I am a Singaporean with a double-barrelled race, can I change my first component race to facilitate my flat application?

HDB will recognise only the records registered with the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) in the administration of the EIP. If you have a double-barrelled race and wish to make changes to your race, you must comply with ICA’s requirements on such changes.

■ I will soon be 30 years old and will have to re-register for my NRIC. Can I re-register online, with a request to change my single race to a double-barrelled one?

No. If you are an NRIC registrant who wants to change your race, you will need to submit the request personally at the Citizen Services Centre on level 3 of the ICA building. You will have to execute a Statutory Declaration and undertake not to change your race again.

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